



2024-25 Virtual School Report

Mission Statement

We work in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure that Children We Care For (CWCF), wherever they reside, and Oxfordshire-based care-experienced children and young people have timely, stable access to education, employment and training that meets their individual needs.

Our statutory mission is to support CWCF and care leavers in overcoming barriers to education, employment and training, and to advocate for previously cared for children - creating environments where they can thrive and reach their full potential.

Alongside this, we champion children with a social worker and those in kinship care, recognising the importance of inclusive support for all children facing challenges in accessing education to improve their life chances.

We are committed to working with partners to enhance practice across the education system for the benefit of the children and young people we serve.

School Vision

To ensure that every Child We Care For (CWCF), for whom we hold statutory casework responsibility, can:

- **ACCESS:** Secure access to high-quality educational provision
- **ENGAGE:** Engage positively and meaningfully with their education
- **EXCEL:** Make excellent progress across all aspects of their learning and development

Core Aims*

- To support every CWCF to secure a suitable educational placement which meets their educational and pastoral needs and enables them to thrive. 16–18-year-olds and care leavers are supported to access education, training and employment opportunities in-line with their future career aspirations.
- To ensure that CWCF can engage positively with their education and that barriers to education are removed.
- Through the delivery of a programme of support, guidance and training, develop the capacity of schools/education providers and Further Education (FE) providers (as well as key stakeholders) to meet the needs of targeted vulnerable groups of children in Oxfordshire – CWCF, previously cared for children, children in kinship care and children with a social worker.
- To ensure that the gap in the attainment and progress of CWCF is diminished.
- To enable CWCF and care leavers to experience a range of cultural opportunities to strengthen a sense of wellbeing and worth.

* Our core aims recognise that CWCF and care leavers are the primary cohort for whom the Virtual School holds direct casework responsibility, including oversight of Personal Education Plans (PEPs), progress tracking and multi-agency coordination.

Additional Aims

- To advocate for and promote the educational outcomes of children with a social worker and those in kinship care, ensuring their needs are understood and addressed across education settings, even where statutory duties do not apply.
- To use data and professional expertise to influence system-wide improvements for all vulnerable learners, particularly those affected by social care involvement.
- To champion inclusive practice and trauma-informed approaches across schools and settings, ensuring that all children and young people supported by the Virtual School are given the opportunity to thrive.

Oxfordshire Virtual School Context (July 2025)

Key Stage	CWCF	Male	Female	EHCP	K - SEN Support	Number in County	Number Out of County	CWCF in Global Majority Groups
EYFS	99	55	44	8	19	63	36	31
KS1	53	27	26	8	31	31	22	14
KS2	118	63	55	50	38	67	51	34
KS3	168	83	85	81	52	77	91	34
KS4	178	109	69	71	52	89	89	54
KS5	299	216	83	78	41	195	104	161
Totals	915	553	362	296	233	522	393	161
Percentages		60%	40%	32%	25%	57%	43%	36%

Post 16	Care Leavers	Male	Female	EHCP	K - SEN Support	Number in County	Number Out of County	CWCF in Global Majority Groups
Years 14, 15, 16, 17+	447	300	147	112	46	332	115	210

Key Priorities for 2024-25:

In 2024-25, we identified the following priorities to help move us closer to our stated vision and aims:

- To ensure that all CWCF children have access to a suitable educational placement in a timely manner and without undue delays.
- To ensure that the needs of CWCF and care leavers are adequately met so that they can engage positively with their education. As a result, children and young people attend school regularly, suspensions and exclusions of CWCF are minimised.
 - **Increase pupil attendance and reduce persistent absence across all key stages and in all types of settings.**
 - **To ensure that no CWCF are permanently excluded from their educational settings and suspensions continue to go down.**
- To ensure that all CWCF and care leavers can make good progress in their learning and achieve high levels of attainment across all key stages.
- To enhance the capacity of schools and other LA partners within Oxfordshire and beyond to better understand and meet the educational needs of our most vulnerable groups – CWCF, care leavers, previously cared for children, children with social worker and children in kinship care*.
- To engage CWCF and care leavers in a range of cultural experiences to enhance the mental health, wellbeing, and sense of self-worth.

* The Virtual School does have extended duties to promote the education of previously cared for children, children in kinship care and children with a social worker. However, this report focuses on our core (corporate parent) duties and the impact we have made on our CWCF and care leavers.

Executive Summary

In 2024-25, the Virtual School strengthened its commitment to inclusive and trauma-informed practice, broadening advocacy to children with a social worker and those in kinship care while maintaining a sharp focus on statutory duties for Children We Care For (CWCF) and care leavers. Strategic partnerships and targeted interventions played a pivotal role in reducing barriers to education, improving attendance and supporting transitions, particularly for those with complex needs or experiencing school moves.

Performance against key priorities reflected both notable achievements and ongoing challenges. Most school moves for CWCF without SEND were completed swiftly, while those involving EHCPs remained more complex. When delays occurred, alternative provision and evidence-based programmes such as Mulberry Bush Outreach and One Eighty were deployed to support emotional wellbeing and re-engagement. Attendance rates for CWCF in primary phases remained above national averages, with persistent absence and suspensions continuing to fall. Academic attainment improved, especially in Key Stage 2 and among post-16 learners, with a record number of care leavers starting and graduating from university. Bespoke support and enrichment activities contributed to successful transitions and positive outcomes for young people.

Feedback from children, carers and professionals underscores the Virtual School's impact. Pupil Voice increasingly shapes interventions and provision, while participation initiatives - such as the Orientation Programme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children - have enhanced wellbeing and readiness for education. Despite rising complexity in emotional and behavioural needs, as indicated by SDQ scores, the Virtual School remains committed to trauma-informed support and continuous improvement. These achievements reflect Oxfordshire's dedication to improving educational experiences and life chances for CWCF and care leavers, with ongoing efforts to address challenges and build on successes in the year ahead.

How did we perform against our 2024-25 priorities?

It is important to recognise that all of our children have additional needs associated with their experiences prior to and during care. Many have complex and profound needs, and all will have experienced disruptions to their education that can significantly impact both attainment and progress.

Due to the nature of our cohort - sometimes small in number and always highly individualised - percentage-based data can sometimes present a misleading or overly negative picture. Furthermore, comparative data with national and statistical neighbours is not available until March, and therefore cannot be included in this report.

We ask readers to take these factors into account when interpreting the information presented and to consider the broader context of care-experienced learners when evaluating outcomes.

Priorities	Evaluation of progress made
<p><i>The time taken to find a suitable school for children with an EHCP is significantly reduced.</i></p> <p><i>All children requiring a school move (excluding those with an EHCP) are moved into a suitable school within 20 days.</i></p>	<p>Excellent partnership working between LA teams (Virtual School, Social Care and School Admissions) and strong professional relationships with schools (LA maintained and academies) means that, when Children We Care For (CWCF) require a school move, this happens swiftly and without unnecessary delay.</p> <p>The percentage of school moves completed in 20 days decreased from 86.9% in 2023-24 to 78% in 2024-25. However, this academic year, we've seen a notable increase of 60 additional pupils of statutory school age entering care and it is worth considering that over 70% of school moves were out-of-county. For CWCF without SEND, the average number of days for a school move was 13.65, an increase on 5.4 at the end of 2023-24 but still less than the average of 16.6 in 2022-23.</p> <p>For children with complex SEND and who are supported by an EHCP, the process is slower and children with the most complex needs can be difficult to place in a school that can meet need. The average number of days in 2024-25 taken to complete a school move for CWCF with an EHCP plan was 70.67 days which is an increase from 34.35 days in 2023-24. Out of the 27 CWCF with EHCPs who moved this year, 5 (who were moving from special settings) took over 200 days to secure a move. The average days to complete a school move for the other 22 CWCF with EHCPs was 22.23 days.</p>
<p><i>Where children are not able to secure a new placement to coincide exactly with a care move, alternative educational provision is put in place immediately. Alternative provision is up to 25 hours or to the maximum the child can access.</i></p>	<p>On the occasions when access to a school place is delayed, Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) and a small portion of High Needs Block funding is used to secure robust educational provision for children who are awaiting a suitable school place. This may include tuition (online/in-person), access to alternative provisions and activities to support the social emotional development of the children.</p> <p>In 2024-25, 39 CYP were supported with alternative provision commissioned by the Virtual School between 1st September 2024 and 31st March 2025. 45 CYP were supported with alternative provision commissioned via OCC's Brokerage Team from 1st April 2025. This excludes tuition commissioned directly by schools using PP+ released to them via the PEP.</p> <p>Commissioned Mulberry Bush Outreach support provided 8 <i>Observation and Reflective Forums</i> for primary schools and 4 <i>Early Intervention sessions</i> for secondary schools, supporting pupils to re-engage with learning and reduce suspensions. This was achieved by equipping staff to understand behaviour as communication, build positive relationships and meet the additional needs of vulnerable children.</p>

Impact examples:

- A child in Reception, with significant emotional and behavioural needs and a history of trauma and family instability, received Mulberry Bush Outreach alongside other support. This helped maintain their education through multiple moves, improved emotional wellbeing and enabled them to achieve early learning goals, with multi-agency support for a successful transition.
- A Year 2 pupil, removed from home after severe neglect and with delayed development, benefited from Mulberry Bush input as part of a wider package. The intervention contributed to full-time school attendance, accelerated progress, improved emotional health and reduced risk of placement breakdown.
- A child in Year 4, experiencing trauma, dysregulation and isolation, accessed Mulberry Bush support in addition to other interventions. Outcomes included increased classroom time, improved self-awareness, reduced exclusions and a more stable school experience.


15 CYP were supported by One Eighty, an evidence-based organisation that offers bespoke one-to-one interventions to support CYP with complex needs who are struggling with transition.

Impact examples:

- A child in Year 2, removed from home after severe neglect and with no prior school experience, faced significant barriers including delayed development and placement breakdowns. With One Eighty, the child received 1:1 support and staff training, resulting in full-time school attendance, accelerated progress, improved emotional health and thriving in school.
- A Year 4 pupil with ADHD and SEMH, affected by trauma and frequent absconding, received a One Eighty intervention alongside additional adult support and trauma-informed practice. Outcomes included increased classroom time, improved self-awareness, reduced exclusions and a finalised EHCP, embedding positive strategies for future learning
- A child in Year 6 with complex SEMH and ADHD, experiencing multiple exclusions and unstable placements, was referred to One Eighty and received a phased reintegration plan. This led to full-time attendance, improved behaviour, a successful transition to secondary school and enhanced pastoral support.

18 CYP were supported by Educational Psychology Service. This provision is particularly impactful for our children with both identified and emerging special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Support was delivered through tailored psychological assessments and broader advisory input, enhancing the capacity of schools and settings to meet individual needs effectively.

12 CYP accessed a range of bespoke programmes at Meadowbrook College, including the Next Step transition pathway. These programmes offered flexible, tailored support for those at risk of exclusion, focusing on academic re-engagement, social and emotional development and preparation for reintegration into mainstream or post-16 settings. Provision included individualised timetables, specialist staff input, therapeutic and creative activities, and multi-agency collaboration, ensuring each child's needs were met and progress was closely monitored.

	<p>Impact examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One young person re-engaged with learning after a period of absence, built positive relationships with staff, achieved qualifications in English, Maths and Employability Skills, and developed greater independence and readiness for college transition. ▪ Another individual, with a highly personalised programme, made progress in emotional wellbeing and creative engagement, building trusted relationships and confidence through art and nurture activities, despite limited academic participation. The programme adapted to their needs, prioritising therapeutic input and multi-agency support. <p>50 unaccompanied CYP, all male and aged 15-17, and from 10 different countries, accessed the 4-week Orientation Programme (OP) on their arrival to Oxfordshire. The OP provides English language lessons, information sessions, as well as an orientation to Oxford City Centre. 100% completed the OP and all progressed into educational settings at the end of the programme.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  REUK_OP_End of Year Report_Apr 2024 </div>
<p><i>All 16–18-year-olds will be engaged in employment, education and/or training.</i></p>	<p>In August 2025, 80% of CWCF and care leavers, aged 16 – 18, were engaged in employment, education and/or training. This is in line with the previous year.</p>
	<p>A number of Post-16 students achieved Grade 4–9 in English or Maths at the end of 2024-25, further supporting their progression routes while others successfully completed Level 1 and 2 qualifications across a diverse range of subjects, including practical areas like Art and Design, Hair and Beauty, and Engineering; professional fields such as Health and Social Care and Business; and academic pathways like STEM, ESOL, literacy and employability programmes.</p> <p>These achievements are a testament to the resilience, ambition and talent of our young people - and to the consistent, compassionate support from carers, teachers, social workers, personal advisers and mentors across Oxfordshire and beyond.</p>
	<p>Nos. of Oxfordshire Care Leavers starting, attending and graduating from university increase year-on-year.</p> <p>18 care leavers started at a university in September 2025, an increase of 8 on 2023-24 figures. The total number in Higher Education in July 2025 was 36, with 15 graduating compared to 4 last year.</p> <p>14 x Year 10 learners from Oxfordshire accessed Brookes and Beyond in 2024-25, joined by 10 learners from other neighbouring local authorities. Brookes and Beyond is an Oxford Brookes University access project designed to recruit students from under-represented groups. It involves regular experiential workshops throughout the year (Brookes Engage) and a residential summer school for CWCF and care leavers.</p>
<p><i>School attendance rates for CWCF continue to increase until they reach 100%.</i></p>	<p>The attendance rate for CWCF (statutory age, reported cohort) in 2024-25 was 87.8%, in line with the rate in 2023-24 of 87.11%.</p> <p>National data indicates a slight increase in attendance rates for all school-aged children from 92.8% in 2023-24 to 93.1% in 2024-25. There was a slight decrease in attendance rates for CWCF (reported cohort) nationally in</p>

<p>Severe absence rates reduce significantly.</p> <p>All CWCF, across all key stages and all setting types, attend school regularly.</p> <p>The gap in the attendance of CWCF and non-CWCF is diminished across all areas and groups.</p>	<p>2023/24 from 91.7% to 91.2%. Statistics for 2024-25 will not be published until March 2026.</p> <p>Overall attendance of primary-aged CWCF was 96.01%, up from 95.78% in 2023-24, in line with the 2023-24 national rate for CWCF (reported cohort) at 96.1%.</p> <p>In the primary phase, attendance remains strong, with rates consistently above 94% for most year groups and very low levels of unauthorised absence. Persistent absence is mainly linked to pupils with complex needs or those experiencing school moves and targeted interventions are in place to support these children.</p> <p>Overall attendance of secondary-aged CWCF rose to 84.25% in 2024-25 compared to 82.97% in 2023-24. The national average for 2024-25 is 91.4% for all pupils and was 88.5% for CWCF (reported cohort) in 2023-24. Year 11 attendance was up to 80.30% compared to 74.72% last year.</p> <p>In the secondary phase, attendance is more variable, with some students facing significant barriers due to complex circumstances. The Secondary Team works closely with schools, carers and alternative providers to monitor attendance, address barriers and implement tailored interventions, helping many young people improve their engagement with education.</p> <p>Across both phases, the Virtual School's proactive approach and partnership working are key to maintaining and improving attendance.</p> <p>The overall percentage of children with less than 90% attendance (persistent absence, reported cohort) decreased by 4% to 30.7% in 2024-25 compared to 34.7% in 2023-24. Persistent absence of primary-aged CWCF this year was in line with 2023-24 at 7.87%, which is significantly lower than the national rate in 2024-25 of 13.5%.</p> <p>The rate of unauthorised attendance was 3.73% in 2024-25 which is marginally less than 2023-24 (3.85%). For our primary CWCF, the rate was significantly low at 0.3%, with the secondary rate at 5.2%. Nationally in 2024-25, unauthorised absence in secondary schools decreased slightly from 3.5% to 3.3% and in Primary schools from 1.6% to 1.5%. There was a slight increase in special schools from 3.3% to 3.4%.</p> <p>For full details of trends in attendance for CWCF, please see the relevant data table in the annex to this report.</p>
<p>The number of CWCF receiving a suspension continues to decrease until they are no longer needed or used.</p>	<p>The rate of CWCF receiving a suspension has decreased slightly to 12.28% (64 children) in 2024-25, down from 12.38% (77 children) in 2023-24. We will not be able to see how this compares to national data for CWCF until the data is released in March 2026.</p> <p>Suspensions in the primary phase remain relatively low, with 13 suspensions recorded from 9 pupils across 8 schools in 2024–25. Most suspensions were due to physical assault or persistent disruptive behaviour, and a significant proportion of those suspended had identified special educational needs (SEN) - with 4 on SEN Support and 5 with EHCPs.</p> <p>There has been a decrease in suspensions during 2024–25 in the secondary phase, although some individual students have experienced multiple suspensions due to complex needs and challenging circumstances.</p> <p>The Virtual School help schools to reduce suspensions by prioritising early intervention and strong partnership. Programmes like One-Eighty and Mulberry Bush Outreach equip schools to understand behaviour and support</p>

	<p>at-risk pupils. In secondary, proactive collaboration with schools and alternative providers has helped prevent permanent exclusions and reintegrate students. This relational, preventative approach has led to fewer suspensions and better engagement in education.</p>
<p><i>No CWCF will receive 2 or more suspension periods.</i></p>	<p>In 2022-23, 51 CWCF received more than one suspension. This decreased to 46 in 2023-24. In 2024-25, the number of CWCF receiving more than one suspension has continued to decrease, with 35 recorded by the end of the academic year.</p>
<p><i>No CWCF are permanently excluded.</i></p>	<p>In 2024–25, we had one permanent exclusion upheld - matching the number from 2023–24. Although we pursued an Independent Review, believing there were important lessons for the school in how it supports care-experienced young people, the exclusion was ultimately upheld. Nationally, the permanent exclusion rate increased from 0.11% in 2022–23 to 0.13% in 2023–24.</p> <p>All CWCF have a dedicated Virtual School Case Worker who works closely with schools, advocates on their behalf and facilitates PEP meetings to ensure provision matches pupil needs. Case holders provide ongoing support to raise attainment, improve attendance and reduce the risk of exclusion. Strong links between schools, local Exclusion and Reintegration Teams and the Virtual School enable early help and intervention when CWCF are at risk.</p> <p>Thanks to this collaborative approach, four other possible permanent exclusions were avoided. For example, in secondary, a student at risk of exclusion was supported through a combination of alternative provision, regular meetings and a reintegration plan, resulting in a successful return to school. Another secondary pupil, initially facing a permanent exclusion, had the decision rescinded after intensive work with the school, Exclusions Team and alternative providers. In primary, targeted interventions such as One-Eighty and Mulberry Bush Outreach helped schools better understand and manage behaviour, preventing exclusion for several pupils with complex needs.</p> <p>Looking ahead to 2025-26, we are hosting another Designated Teacher Practice Day, this time focusing on fostering belonging and inclusion for all care-experienced children. Our first Designated Teacher Practice Day, held in January 2025, was introduced in response to practitioner feedback that coming together in person would be more impactful than termly online network meetings. It centred on restorative practice and strategies to break the cycle of suspensions, prompted by rising figures - and our data suggests it made a positive difference.</p>
<p><i>100% of children deemed to be making good or better than expected progress, as recorded in their Personal Education Plans.</i></p>	<p>In the 2024-25 Summer Term, 84% of primary-aged children made ‘Good’ progress, 74% of secondary-aged children, 80% of Year 12 young people and 88% of Year 13 young people, as recorded in their ePEP.</p> <p>We uphold a rigorous quality assurance process for PEPs, with 97% of statutory school-age PEPs initially rated ‘Amber’ or ‘Green’ following submission by Designated Teachers. Virtual School Caseworkers provide targeted support to ensure all PEPs reached at least ‘Green’ standard before sign-off and the release of Pupil Premium Plus, with a strong focus on SMART target-setting and individualised planning. The introduction of a detailed evaluation framework within our new ePEP platform will further strengthen our ability to monitor and analyse quality.</p>
<p><i>The percentage of children reaching expected standards</i></p>	<p>EYFS results were slightly lower than last year’s results (27.3%) with 25% of the reported cohort achieving Good Learning Development in the prime areas</p>

<p><i>across all key stages (EYFS, Phonics and Key Stage 2, GCSEs and Post-16 qualifications show a notable improvement that is at least in-line with benchmarks set nationally and by statistical neighbours.</i></p>	<p>of learning. It is worth noting that the reported cohort was very small at just 4 CWCF with one child on an EHCP and another on SEN Support.</p>
	<p>The percentage of Year 1s reaching the expected standard in Phonics was 50% which is in line with 2023-24 figures. There was a small decrease in the percentage of CWCF reaching the expected standard at the end of Year 2, down from 81.8% in 2023-24 to 72.7% but still significantly higher than 2022-23 and 2021-22.</p> <p>Almost one-third (30%) of CWCF in Year 1 (reported cohort) now have EHCPs to further support them in school and a further 60% receive SEN Support. This highlights the level of additional needs.</p>
	<p>Key Stage 1 (Year 2) results for 2024-25 show that 36.36% of CWCF met the expected standard in Reading, 27.27% in Writing and 45.45% in Maths. In Reading, Writing and Maths combined, 27.27% of CWCF met the expected standard.</p> <p>9.09% of CWCF achieved greater depth in Reading, Writing and Maths combined, maintaining the improvement seen last year.</p> <p>Compared to previous years, outcomes in 2024-25 reflect a recovery from the significant dip in 2023, with results in Writing and Combined measures now above pre-pandemic levels. Maths continues to be a relative strength for CWCF. The proportion achieving greater depth has been sustained, marking a positive trend in higher attainment.</p> <p>We will not be able to see how this compares to national data for CWCF until the data is released in March 2026.</p>
	<p>In 2024-25, the Key Stage 2 reported cohort comprised 24 pupils, with 75% identified as having special educational needs and 50% holding EHCPs. Attainment results show that 29.17% of pupils achieved the expected standard or greater depth in combined Reading, Writing, and Maths (up from 21.05% in 2023-24). Reading was the strongest subject with 45.83% reaching the expected standard, while Writing and Maths both saw 29.16% of pupils meeting expectations. Additionally, 8.33% of pupils achieved greater depth in Reading, Writing and Maths.</p> <p>These results reflect the impact of targeted interventions, including 1:1 tuition funded by Pupil Premium Plus and EP assessments, which supported accelerated progress for several pupils, especially in Reading and Writing. Despite the challenges posed by a smaller cohort and a high level of additional needs, the Virtual School's enrichment programmes - such as Letterbox Parcels and Phoenix Comic - continue to foster engagement and language development.</p> <p>Overall, Key Stage 2 outcomes demonstrate a positive trend in combined attainment, with Reading remaining a relative strength. The continued focus on bespoke support and enrichment has contributed to improved outcomes for CWCF at the end of primary education, even in the context of complex needs and a changing cohort profile.</p>
	<p>In 2024-25, the Virtual School supported 84 young people through their Year 11 studies (60 in the reported cohort). This cohort was notably diverse, with a significant proportion of students having complex needs, including a high number (52%) with EHCPs and a greater presence of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children compared to previous years. Many students had experienced</p>

disrupted educational journeys, including multiple school moves and periods out of education, reflecting the ongoing challenges faced by children we care for.

Despite these complexities, the commitment to ensuring positive outcomes remained strong. Of the Year 11 cohort, 12 students achieved at least a Grade 4 in English and 14 achieved at least a Grade 4 in Maths. Eight students secured at least a Grade 4 in both English and Maths. Several students who had only recently arrived in the UK or for whom English is an additional language achieved passes in core subjects, highlighting the impact of targeted support and tailored interventions.

There were a number of individual successes that exemplify the determination and progress of our young people. For example, one student who moved school in Year 11 and missed several terms of education still achieved strong passes in English and Maths, as well as a vocational qualification. Another student, for whom English is an additional language and who had only been in the country for a year, achieved five GCSEs including high grades in Maths and Science. Several students achieved a full suite of GCSEs at Grade 4 or above, with some attaining grades 7, 8, or even 9 in subjects such as English Literature, Art and Polish. Others accessed functional skills and vocational qualifications, ensuring that all young people could celebrate meaningful achievements at the end of Key Stage 4.

The breadth of qualifications achieved and the individual stories of progress within this cohort highlight the importance of flexible pathways and personalised support. The Virtual School's approach has been to work closely with schools, carers and external agencies to maximise each student's potential, regardless of their starting point or circumstances. As a result, many young people are now well placed to move confidently into post-16 education or training.

The 2024-25 Year 11 cohort were Year 6 pupils in 2019-20, meaning they did not experience a typical end to their primary education or benefit from a fully supported transition to secondary school. This disruption would have had a lasting impact, with many students missing out on crucial rites of passage, preparation and the continuity of care that underpins successful transitions and future wellbeing.

We also know from [Rees Centre research](#) that for every 5% of possible school sessions missed due to school absences, young people in care score over two grades less at GCSE. We also know that each additional change of care placement after age 11 is associated with one-third of a grade less at GCSE and young people in care who changed school in Years 10 or 11 scored over five grades less than those who did not.

This year, we celebrated some outstanding achievements among our Post-16 learners. The pass rate for Level 3 remains high at 91% compared with 93% last year. Students completed a wide range of qualifications, including A-Levels, T-Levels and Level 3 vocational diplomas, with many securing places at leading universities and progressing into employment or apprenticeships.

Among the success stories, one young person achieved A/A/A*/C/B in Biology, Maths, Further Maths, Philosophy and Ethics, plus an Extended Project, and is now heading to the University of St Andrews to study Ecology and Conservation. Another completed a T-Level in Digital Design and Production

	<p>with a Distinction and is preparing to join Plymouth University. A third completed the Level 3 Diploma in Creative Media with a Merit and is actively seeking employment or an apprenticeship in the media industry. Additionally, two students completed Access to Higher Education courses with Merits, one progressing to Nursing at Oxford Brookes University and another planning to study Midwifery at Birmingham City University after a gap year.</p> <p>The number of care leavers graduating from university continues to grow, with 15 completing degrees this year and 21 continuing their studies at institutions such as St Andrews, Edinburgh, Manchester and Oxford Brookes, in subjects ranging from Conservation and Music to Pharmacy, Psychology, Criminology and Fine Art.</p> <p>In August 2025, 74% of Year 12 CWCF and 80% of Year 13 CWCF/care leavers were participating in education, employment and training (EET). In 2025, nationally, for all young people aged 16 – 24, 87.5% were recorded as EET.</p>
<p><i>To meet targets for CWCF set across a range of areas including placement (school admission), attendance, exclusions and attainment and progress.</i></p>	<p>In 2024-25, we facilitated 32 training sessions, including a Designated Teacher Practice Day. Training covered a range of themes (from <i>Brain development and the impact of trauma</i> to <i>Formulation – Planning interventions for complex children: where to start and how to go on</i>) to enable and empower education practitioners to meet the needs of all cohorts we have a duty to serve. 155 agencies and 291 professionals accessed Virtual School training in 2024-25.</p> <p>99% of Virtual School training participants agreed/strongly agreed that the training met its aims.</p> <p>The average rating out of 10 (re: knowledge and understanding) before training was 5.8 and 8.71 after the training.</p> <p>80% of Virtual School training participants felt the training they accessed would benefit all cohorts the Virtual School have duty to promote. 75% said it would specifically benefit children with a social worker. 72% said it would specifically benefit previously cared for children.</p> <p>96% of professionals would recommend Virtual School training to a colleague.</p> <p>Our partnership Dr Hester Riviere, Senior Educational Psychologist in ATTACH, has had a transformative impact on trauma-informed and attachment-aware practice across Oxfordshire in 2024-25. Through this collaboration, 737 professionals have accessed high-quality training, whole-school sessions and conferences, with 462 staff specifically trained in using PACE in educational contexts. Fifteen schools benefited from whole-staff training and 43 headteachers received specialist input on trauma-informed leadership. The feedback has been unanimously positive, with participants reporting that sessions met their needs, explained models clearly and supported meaningful reflection. Direct support was provided for 42 care-experienced children across 39 schools, alongside education consultations for school staff, the UASC Team, social workers, and colleagues from ATTACH and Adopt Thames Valley. The partnership also delivered five statutory psychological assessments for EHCPs and specialist input for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. As a representative of the Virtual School, Dr Riviere has played an active strategic role in developing Oxfordshire's Relational Schools Programme and led a joint project with Adopt Thames Valley to improve educational experiences for adopted children. Her expertise and commitment have been instrumental in embedding relational, trauma-informed approaches across our schools, supporting professionals and improving outcomes for all of our cohorts.</p> <p>To date, 44 schools and settings have actively enrolled in the Relational Schools Programme, alongside 19 professionals from partner organisations</p>

	including OCC CEF, School Health Nurses, CAMHS/MHST and Oxford Brookes University. A further 19 schools and settings are currently on the waiting list for future cohorts, reflecting strong ongoing interest and demand.
<i>Improvement in children's wellbeing in schools and demonstrated through a positive impact on SDQ scores.</i>	<p>The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a key tool used to monitor the emotional and behavioural wellbeing of CWCF in our schools.</p> <p>In an AI-generated sample of 2024-25 PEPs, the average SDQ score was 18.75. This is a notable increase compared to last year, when the average SDQ score in PEP 1 was 12.9 and in PEP 2 was 13.05. As the SDQ is a measure where higher scores indicate greater emotional and behavioural difficulties, this rise suggests that, on average, children in our cohort are presenting with more complex needs than in previous years.</p> <p>It is important to interpret this increase in context. Several factors may contribute to higher SDQ scores:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addressing trauma: As children begin to process and address deep-seated trauma, it is common for emotional and behavioural challenges to become more pronounced before improvement is seen. Therapeutic interventions, while essential, can temporarily heighten distress as children work through difficult experiences. - Transitions: Many CWCF experience changes in care placements or school settings. These transitions can be highly stressful, leading to increased anxiety and behavioural issues as children adapt to new environments and relationships. - Complex needs: Our cohort continues to include children with significant and overlapping needs, often requiring specialist and ongoing interventions. The complexity of these needs is reflected in the SDQ data. - Data Quality: We also recognise that some of the increase may be due to changes in data recording or human error. As part of our quality assurance processes, we are reviewing the accuracy and consistency of SDQ data entry. <p>Although the SDQ data for 2024-25 does not yet demonstrate the desired improvement in children's wellbeing, it provides valuable insight into the ongoing and evolving needs of our cohort. The rise in average SDQ scores highlights the importance of strengthening our quality assurance processes, including closer monitoring of data, ensuring accuracy in entry and reviewing the context behind rising scores. It also reinforces the need for trauma-informed, targeted support and ongoing professional development for staff.</p> <p>For children with complex needs where SDQ data may not be appropriate, we are exploring alternative ways to measure and understand wellbeing more accurately. Our commitment remains to use this data to inform practice, refine interventions and ensure that every child receives the support they need to thrive in school.</p> <p>The Virtual School has promoted, arranged or facilitated a range of activities designed to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of CWCF. This includes access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth Voices and Guardians For Us Forum; ▪ The Music for Wellbeing Programme; ▪ Welcome Packs for all children new into care; ▪ BookTrust Letterbox parcels; ▪ Dolly Parton's Imagination Library; ▪ Phoenix Comics for all children in Key Stage 2; ▪ Good luck cards for all Year 11s;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Year 6 to 7 transition packs for secondary starters and much more. <p>Our team is also represented on the Fostering Care Panel and Lifelong Links Steering Group. We are committed to advocating for our children in every possible way to ensure they achieve better outcomes and thrive.</p>
<i>High levels of CWCF accessing opportunities being presented.</i>	<p>Our Participation and Engagement Officer and Apprentice organised and facilitated a variety of creative, consultative, and celebratory events with children and young people (CYP) across the year:</p> <p>Creative and celebratory engagements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Care to Dance – Movement and connection with 17 CYP ▪ Guardians For Us – Online advocacy event with 6 CYP ▪ Celebration Event for Children We Care For – Attended by 50 CYP <p>Consultative and strategic participation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth Voice Participation – Ongoing involvement in shaping services through surveys, app feedback, and informal forums ▪ Social Work Apprenticeship Interviews – CYP helped interview 40 candidates, with 7 CYP actively involved ▪ International Social Worker Events – CYP supported recruitment and welcome activities ▪ Digital Tools and App Development – CYP provided feedback to improve council engagement platforms <p>We have seen a continued positive and proactive response to our participation in the NTS programme to redistribute unaccompanied children. The Orientation Programme (OP) has proved to be an effective way of welcoming unaccompanied children/young people to the county and introducing them to the services and teams they will need. The programme covers a range of areas including health, education, legal services, wellbeing and safety. It leads seamlessly into education options for these young people.</p> <p>In 2024-25, the Orientation Programme (OP) delivered by Refugee Education UK supported 50 newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people in Oxfordshire, all male and aged 15-17. The group included 20 from Sudan, 10 from Iran, 4 each from Afghanistan and Syria, 3 from Turkey, 2 each from Albania, Somalia, Eritrea, and Vietnam, and 1 from Yemen. Attendance was consistently high, with most joining in person and a few online due to placements outside the county. After completing the four-week programme, 22 progressed to EMBS, 15 to Oxford Spires Academy, 4 to EMBS Banbury, 2 to Croydon or Lewisham College, 1 to City of Oxford College and 6 to other EET destinations.</p> <p>All participants completed the OP and feedback from schools, colleges and Children's Social Care continues to highlight improved attendance, engagement and readiness for formal education. Young people reported significant gains in English language skills and understanding of British life, laws and safety. The programme's flexibility allowed support for two Afghan boys from a resettlement scheme. Partnerships with organisations like Multaka and Asylum Welcome enriched the experience with cultural and social activities. The OP remains a vital foundation for newly arrived young people, ensuring a smooth transition into education and life in the UK.</p>
<i>Positive feedback received from children,</i>	<p>From Pupil Voice captured via PEPs, Youth Voice engagement events/interventions, the Bright Spots Survey feedback, CYP&F comments/feedback at/after events, professional feedback and one-off</p>

carers and other professionals.

testimonials, we have a wealth of feedback from children, carers and other professionals.

Here are some representative quotes from young people, randomly selected by AI from a sample of ePEPs, regarding their education:

What helps me overcome barriers:

- ✚ "Let me have a brain break and run around. Use the reflection room to chill out. Let me do colouring or give me space." - (KS2, SEMH)
- ✚ "When I am sad, I can always tell a teacher." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "If I get upset at school, I would like the adults to help me by letting me do colouring or giving me space." - (KS2, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I need help making more friends." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "If I get upset, I would like to be left alone, by myself and my stuff as I would be scared that people touch it." - (KS3, secondary pupil)
- ✚ "I like it quiet. Grown ups to help me." - (KS2, primary pupil with SEMH)
- ✚ "I tend to see a trusted adult or walk around with other students if I get upset." - (KS4, secondary pupil)
- ✚ "I am starting to show interest in other children. My key worker and all the adults in nursery help me." - (Early Years, non-verbal)

What makes a difference in school:

- ✚ "Number stacks at school on new iPad. Friendships at school are going well." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I like school dinners and English. Maths and English are the subjects I am good at." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I like coming home and playing. I like doing Lego in school with my friend." - (KS2, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I am awesome at phonics. I like Lego." - (KS2, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I like learning, seeing my teachers, going home. Counting my fingers, playing and art are what I'm good at." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I like forest school and being in the sensory garden. I like being outside, I like running in the wooded area." - (Early Years, non-verbal)
- ✚ "I like dance. I like any activity that my teacher gets out. I enjoy school." - (KS4, non-verbal, specialist provision)

Reflections on progress and support:

- ✚ "I have made great progress in phonics as seen in assessments and recent phonics screening check." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I am good at art." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I am worried about P.E. and being sat on my own." - (KS2, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I am worried about which school I will be going to after this one. More play in the afternoons would help." (KS2, transition)
- ✚ "I am worried about making friends. People wanting to play with me. Playtimes and lunchtimes worry me." - (KS1, primary pupil)
- ✚ "I like school, but I want to get better at reading, writing and number stacks." - (KS2, primary pupil)

Secondary/older pupil reflections:

- ✚ "Life is going well. Life itself, everything is going well. Everything." - (KS3, secondary pupil)
- ✚ "Nothing is going well. Nothing worries me. Dunno, I guess I have to do my work." - (KS4, disengaged)
- ✚ "I enjoy Animal Care. I am worried about friendships. I want teachers to teach me more about how to keep friends." - (KS4, secondary pupil)

- ✚ "Pretty much everything is going well. My collection of Pokémon cards at home is going well and at school, right now Read Write Inc is going really well. My writing is getting better." - (KS3, secondary pupil)
- ✚ "I think the support I received from the Virtual School was significant and influential which helped shape which direction I went within education, but it wasn't forced upon me which I think is the most important thing." – Care Leaver Graduate

Here is a summary of what we learned following an Aspirations Audit for those aged 14-year-olds:

The aspirations audit of 45 Year 9 children we care for in Oxfordshire revealed a diverse range of career interests, spanning creative, practical and service-oriented fields such as football, beauty, catering, and emergency services. Notably, a significant proportion of this cohort have special educational needs, with 42% holding an EHCP and 36% on SEN Support, highlighting the importance of tailored support. The majority (67%) were unsure about the qualifications or experience required for their chosen careers, and most had not yet had work experience or opportunities to visit universities. While some have benefited from guidance from supportive adults, many have not had recent career guidance interviews. These findings highlighted the need for earlier and more comprehensive career education, increased access to work experience and opportunities to explore higher education, so that every child can be inspired to aim high and believe in their potential.

Here are some headlines from what young people we care for said regarding their education, based on the Bright Spots survey 2024:

- ✚ "All of you said that the adults you live with show an interest in your education."
- ✚ "Most of you feel settled at home."
- ✚ "Some of you do not have a really good friend. Almost half of you say that you are afraid to go to school because of bullying."


These quotes reflect both the positive support young people feel from adults regarding their education as well as some of the challenges they face, such as concerns about bullying and friendships.

Here are two quotes from social workers of young people on the Orientation Programme:

- ✚ "OP is fantastic and gives such a good stable start to our new asylum seeker children. The team are very valued."
- ✚ "Just to let you know that [name] did very well at his [school] assessment and his level is Entry Level 2. He said the assessment was the same things he had covered at OP so he has obviously been taking everything in."

Here are three quotes from young people about how they benefited from the Orientation Programme:

- ✚ "Yes, my English has improved, because I had no idea when I came. I learnt a lot of new grammar and I feel ready to start school."
- ✚ "Many things are different from my country – for example having girlfriends, gay people, trans people. I appreciate these sessions because if you don't have these sessions then you can get into trouble. This is very important for us."

	 “I learnt techniques to calm my body when I am overwhelmed. I have not been able to sleep, sometimes all night, and it was good to learn some new things including having a shower before bed and breathing techniques.”
<i>Pupil Voice increasingly informs practice across LA, in schools and beyond.</i>	<p>Pupil Voice is at the heart of our work, captured through PEPs, Youth Voice events, and daily engagement with children and young people (CYP). Their views directly shape our priorities and interventions. See below for examples:</p> <p>Lifelong Links: CYP frequently express the importance of relationships with significant people in their lives. In response, we actively promote Lifelong Links, with our Post-16 EET Worker, Nichola Collins, representing us on the Lifelong Links Steering Group to ensure young people’s voices drive this work.</p> <p>EHCP and provision planning: Pupil Voice is routinely gathered during PEPs and annual reviews, ensuring that EHCPs reflect each child’s aspirations and needs. For example, when a young person in Year 9 was returning to live with their mother, their preferences shaped the interim educational provision and school visits, resulting in a successful transition and improved engagement.</p> <p>Transitions and support: Young people’s feedback about anxiety around school moves and relationships has led to tailored transition plans, including additional visits, social stories and peer mentoring. In one case, a Year 2 child with no prior school experience was supported into education with a bespoke induction plan, informed by their voice and needs, leading to rapid progress and positive relationships.</p> <p>Bespoke curriculum and activities: Where CYP have shared interests or concerns (e.g. a preference for practical learning or anxiety about group settings), we have adapted provision - such as arranging mechanics courses, therapeutic farm placements or small group mentoring - to ensure engagement and success.</p> <p>Post-16 Pathways: Young people’s aspirations are central to planning for further education and training. For example, a Year 11 student’s interest in Health and Social Care led to a tailored college timetable, supporting both their academic and personal development.</p>

While not exhaustive, the above achievements reflect Oxfordshire’s commitment to enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes for CWCF and care leavers. For detailed trends and further information, please refer to the annex of this report.

For full details of data referenced in this report please refer to:

Annual report data annex 2024-25:



SDP 2024-25 Annex 1
Analysis of Pupil Outc

To view our 2025-26 priorities, click here:



Oxfordshire Virtual
School SDP.docx

Our extended duties reports for 2024–25 are available on request.

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